

## CHAPTER XIX.

THE RIVER SPEY—BRIDGE OF FOCHABERS—AND  
THE LEFT BANK TO THE SEA; WITH GAR-  
MOUTH AND KINGSTON.

THE Bridge of Fochabers consisted of four arches, two of 95 feet, and two of 75 feet span each, making a total water-way of 340 feet. The view from it, on the morning of the 4th, presented one vast undulating expanse of dark-brown water, from the foot of the hill of Benagen, on the one hand, to the sea on the other, about ten miles in length, and in many places more than two miles broad. The floating wrecks of Nature, and of human industry and comfort, were strewed over its surface, which was only varied by the appearance of the tufted tops of submerged trees, or by the roofs of houses, to which, in more than one instance, the miserable inhabitants were seen clinging, whilst boats were plying about for their relief. And still the elements raved with unabated fury, so that not a bird could dare to wing the air.

By eight o'clock the flood was 17 feet up on the bridge, but still its giant limbs magnificently bestrode the roaring stream, which, disparted by the opposing piers, closed around them in perfect vortices, forming a high-curved crest from one bank to the other. The Duke of Gordon, who was on the bridge several times during the morning, had reined up his horse to the parapet, pointed out to his party the cauldrons that

boiled about the pillars, and ridden away—Lord Saltoun and Mr Macdowal Grant, younger of Arndilly, had just crossed on foot—the crowds of people, who had been looking over the parapets at the wreck, carcases of dead animals, and other bodies which were hurried through, had all run off to the south end, to see the forester and his men drive piles for the protection of the mound of approach—when Mr Gordon Macewan, a teacher at Fochabers, and seven others, were on their way back from the toll-house, on the red sandstone rock at the north end. It was now about 20 minutes past 12 o'clock—suddenly a crack, no wider than the cut of a sword, opened across the roadway, immediately over the second arch from the toll-house, about 3 yards before them, and backwards, parallel with the parapet. “Good God!” cried Mr Macewan, “the bridge is falling; run for your lives!” With one cry of alarm, he and his companions sprang forward in the direction of Fochabers. The crack yawned wide ere Mr Russel, one of their number, could step across it. He leaped from the falling ruins, and alighted on that part which was yet firm, with one foot hanging behind him in vacancy. Down went the whole mass of the two arches next the left bank, falling with the loose, shattered, and cloud-like appearance of an avalanche into the foaming surge below. For the fraction of a moment the furious stream was driven backwards with impetuous recoil, baring its channel to the very bottom, and again rushing onwards, its thundering roar proclaimed its victory, and not a vestige of the fallen fragments was to be seen.

At the time the alarm was given, William Sive-wright, mason; John Cuthbert, slater; and John Anderson, a lame young man, only son of Widow Anderson,

the toll-keeper, were leaning over the parapet wall. Mrs Anderson, and one of her daughters, had quitted the bridge only a few minutes before. She was sitting by the fire when she heard the terrible crash. "Oh, my son! my son!" exclaimed she, starting up; "he's gone! he's gone!—my son! my son!—I shall never see him again!" And, rushing out, she stared with a phrenzied air on the frightful chasm, wildly repeating the same exclamations. Some of those about her would have persuaded her that her son was on the other side of the river; but the awful truth was too apparent to permit so well-meant a fraud to take effect.

"I saw them running and waving their hats," said Sivewright, when narrating the circumstances, "but before I could guess what they meant, the parapet wall folded round before me, and parted from the roadway, which then seemed whole; but, ere I had time to cry out, it was falling in a thousand pieces, cracking end-long and across from the centre. I sprang sideways past Anderson and Cuthbert, and leaped from fragment to fragment of the falling roadway, as if I had been flying. When I reached the rock I was blind for a moment; and, when I recovered and looked round, Anderson and Cuthbert were gone. In my confusion, I had not at first seen Cuthbert, who now appeared crossing the road. I congratulated him on his escape, and asked him the particulars. "When the brig begud to fa'," said he, "I made a jump to get past, but the shake jostled me ower to the t'ither parapet—a stane struck me, and the road gaed awa' beneath my feet. I then made a claught wi' my hands at the gravel." Luckily for him, it was nearly as hard as a rock, though he did leave the mark of his fingers in it. "When I made the loup," continued Cuthbert, "poor Anderson

made a claught at the tail o' my coat. He missed it, and fell on his back. The parapet wall tumbled doon about him, an' I never saw him again." The poor youth's body was found in the evening, about a quarter of a mile below, lying on his back, his greatcoat entangled among some brushwood, and his hands held up, as if to save himself.

The shriek that spread along both banks of the river, when the bridge fell, was loud and agonizing. People ran in all directions, clamorously inquiring for friends and relatives. Signals and shouts were exchanged from either bank, to tell of the safety of individuals, and many were the joyous recognitions that took place. The Duke rode in great anxiety to the bridge; but, on seeing Lord Saltoun and Mr Grant on the opposite bank, he waved his hat and gave them a hearty cheer. During the afternoon, the people crowded to the spot from all quarters, and many could not be persuaded that the "Brig o' Spey" had actually fallen, until they beheld its ruins with "their ain een." (Plate LIV.)

The piers of the bridge were founded on the surface of a rock of red sandstone, shelving down stream, instead of being laid, as they ought to have been, in a box hewn out of it, to give stability to the building. The materials were not jointed throughout, but only cased with jointed stones; for a rod has been thrust 10 feet into one of the remaining pillars since the flood. Those who saw the fall, agree in describing it as having been precisely like that of a man who is thrown down by the application of a force against his legs; the whole mass of the masonry having gone up stream; from which I have no doubt that, after the foundation was worn away by the vortex that boiled around it, the pillar slid down the stream, and so produced the destruction of the superstructure.

Pursuing the left bank of the river, the farm of Newton had all its low ground flooded, above £400 worth of crop destroyed, and a great deal of land ruined. Essil also suffered severely; and the whole lands from that farm to the river's mouth were inundated and devastated; and the losses of the Garmouth feuars, and the Duke's tenants about Garmouth, have been immense. The families of John and James Lamb, living a little below Essil, were alarmed by the rise of the river, and some of them who drove away the cattle found it impossible to return. An old man, his wife, daughter, and grandchild, were left all night in the house, where the water rose several feet up in the lower rooms, and compelled them to sit in a small loft, listening with horror and apprehension to the flood beating against the walls of their dwelling, and to the fall of the farm-offices, which were from time to time tumbling piecemeal. At length part of the building they were in gave way, and their dread of instant destruction became agonizing. Day dawned, but the light only served to make their danger more manifest. At length a boat was brought, with much toil, from Kingston, by Mr P. Thomson, Lord Seafield's wood-agent. It was conveyed on men's shoulders to the top of a bank, launched, and manned by a gallant crew, who, with great hazard, reached the premises, took out the inmates, and landed them safely at Essil. They had hardly left the house, when the whole walls gave way, and the roof fell in. The buildings, furniture, and crop, were completely annihilated.

The alarm at the Mill of Garmouth, occupied by George Scott, induced his wife and daughters to wade away, driving their cattle before them; whilst the miller and his lad remained to put something to rights about the premises, with the intention of following the family.

But the flood increased, and the tempest still raged, and neither came. After relieving the family of the Lambs next morning, the boatmen pulled for the miller's house. They rowed several times round it, and among the ruined outbuildings, calling loudly on the miller; and, receiving no answer, they turned away, in the sad conviction that the unfortunate inmates had perished. As they were in the act of leaving the place, the wall of the house gave way in a moment, and great part of it fell into the rushing waves. The boatmen pulled off, in dread of being overwhelmed by the fall of the remainder of the building, when, to their no small surprise, they espied Mr Scott's head, and red night-cap, thrust through the broken roof, and heard him calling loudly for help. They gladly returned, lowered him and his lad down into the boat, and placed both of them in safety. Mr Scott's own account was, that, having gone from the mill into the house to dinner, they were surrounded by the water, "which," said he, gaed on growin' an' growin' till between eleven an' twal o'clock. We got up on a table on ane o' the beds, and syne on chairs aboon the table, till we proppit oursels up to the ceilin' o' the hoose. Ilka ither thing was floatin' aboot. The water was full 5 feet deep, an' mysel' but five an' a haulf, an' the loon five feet high. I was hearin' the rummel o' the oot hooses, as they war fa'in', an' sae I began to be frightit that the farrest up end o' our fire-hoose might tummel doon an' kill us baith. So mysel' an' the loon got a haud o' a rope, and swung wi' the help o' it to a bed at the ither end o' the hoose, whar there was nae ceilin', an' we had hardly gotten there, wi' the providence o' God, whan the upper end o' the hoose that we had left died way, an' cam' doon we sic an' awfu' rummel that my heart lap to my mouth wi' fright.

I thought surely the end we war in wad gang neist. But whan I put my head oot o' the roof, an' saw a' the hooses in ruins, an' spied the boat, I trow I praised the Lord for our salvation. What think ye o' my swine, only sax months auld? Ane o' them sweemed doon to the bar, an' then 4 miles east, through the sea to Port-Gordon, whar the poor beast landed safe, an' I sauld him there. Ither three o' them teuk a sea voyage 5 miles to the wast, an' landed at the Blackhill. See, they's them i' the sty there.\* A' my furniture was ruined, an' I thought I wad ha'e been ruined too, if no killed or drooned. But wi' some fash I got a haud o' my watch, an' my bit pickters,† an' some ither usefu' papers, an' rowed them i' my napkin, an' pat them about my throat. I thought whan the water should come there, I wad soon ha'e little need o' them. But feggs I saved them that way." Strange as it may appear, the miller assured his deliverers that he had "*got a glimmer o' sleep aboot five o'clock i' the mornin'.*"

The populous village of Garmouth stands about a quarter of a mile above the embouchure of the Spey, occupying the base and slope of a gently rising ground. It consists of several winding streets. The houses, many of them three storeys high, are built of clay kneaded up with straw, in a frame, as practised in the south of France, at Roanne, for example, the whole of which town is of these materials. Here they are plastered, or rough-cast, with lime, so as to present an extremely good exterior. The smaller village of Kingston stands on a ridge close to the sea-shore, composed

\* These well-authenticated instances of swine swimming to distances so wonderful, quite contradicts the popular error, that, when thrown into the water, they speedily destroy themselves by cutting their throats with their own feet.

† Meaning his bank-notes.

of rounded pebbles brought down by the river, and again thrown up by the tide.\* It has its name from the historical fact of Charles II. having landed here from Holland in 1650. The descendants of a man of the name of Milne, who carried His Majesty ashore, are still in existence; and the family have been distinguished ever since by the appellation of *King Milne*, from the service then performed by their ancestor.

Thomas Milne, or, as some will have it, John Milne, was ferryman here in 1650. The vessel which brought Charles to Scotland could not come into the harbour, but rode at anchor in the bay, whilst a boat was sent to land the King. The boat could not approach the shore sufficiently near to admit of Charles landing dry-shod; and Milne, wading into the tide, turned his broad back to the King at the side of the boat, and resting his hands on his knees, very quietly bade His Majesty "*loup on.*" "Nay, friend," said the King, smiling, though somewhat alarmed at the proposal, "I am too great a weight for so little a man as you." "Od! I may be leetle o' stature," replied Milne, looking up and laughing in Charles' face, "but I'se be bound I'm baith strong an' steedy; an' mony's the weightier burden I've carried i' my day." Amused with the man, and persuaded by those around him that there was no danger, the King mounted on Milne's back, and was landed safely on the boat-green. It does not appear that Milne received any reward for this piece of service. The present representative of the family is Mr William Milne, ship-master at Banff, a very respectable man, who is great-great-grandson to King Thomas. Mr Milne has a son, a half-pay surgeon of the Royal Navy, and he still possesses the small property in Garmouth on which all his

\* Already noticed when treating of the Mouth of the Lossie.



predecessors lived. It is now occupied by his brother-in-law, Mr John Wilson. The old dwelling-house was taken down, and a new house built by the present occupier. With the exception of the present King Milne, all the descendants of the original King Thomas have lived and died here, maintaining their families by salmon-fishing in the Spey, a right enjoyed by all the feuars or proprietors of houses in this place till a comparatively recent period.

It is well known that some Irish auxiliaries were sent by the Earl of Antrim, in 1646, to the west coast of Scotland. Their commander was Alister Mac-Coll-Chiadoch, son of old Coll Chiadoch, who was executed at Dunstaffnage by Argyll, and who was himself afterwards taken and executed in Ireland. Having formed a junction with Montrose, and fought in all his battles, these Irish ultimately partook with him in the affair of Fyvie, and in the retreat that succeeded it. Some of the stragglers from the camp traversed the country till they reached Garmouth, where they burnt houses, carried away property, and spread a general alarm.\* Milne, at the head of a few of his neighbours, bravely endeavoured to resist them, with no other weapon but his boat-hook or *sett*; but being beaten by numbers, after a stout resistance, he was pursued by five or six of the party, eager to put him to death. Having got considerably ahead of them, he forced a door off its hinges, reared it on his shoulders, hurried to the river, threw it in, and jumping upon it, and poisoning his body, he pushed it off; and guiding it with his *sett*, he crossed the stream, and escaped from his enemies, who, in

\* Sir Walter Scott tells us that these Hibernians actually begged of the good citizens of Aberdeen to step out of their clothes, before putting them to death, lest the garments might be injured by the wounds or the blood.

attempting to pass after him in a cart, were swept away and drowned.

With one exception, all my informants agree that Charles II. was not only received on his landing by the then Knight of Innes, but that the King also dined with him in a house of his then occupied by his son. Many still alive remember to have seen the house entire. It was two storeys high, built, like the others, of clay and straw, with an outside stair, and contained three rooms and a kitchen. The upper apartments were pannelled all round.\* It was in this very house that the clergy of Moray presented Charles with the *Solemn League and Covenant*, which he signed. This fact is slightly alluded to in the title to it, as given in the printed copies of the Confession of Faith of the Scottish Church, where it is said that it was "*taken and subscribed by King Charles II. at Spey, June 23, 1650, and at Scoon, January 1, 1651.*"

Notwithstanding the breadth of the plain on the right bank of the river, great part of the lands of Garmouth were under water by seven o'clock on the evening of the 3d of August; yet none of the inhabitants had any dread of damage, far less of danger. Not so those of Kingston, who began to fear that the rolling tide, increased to mountains by the furious north-east wind, would sweep away the lower end of that village. Mr Thomson, becoming alarmed for Lord Seafield's wood depôt, hastened to the stacking ground, which he found inundated. There he kept his people working hard, till the water rose so rapidly on them that their

\* Part of the gable is still standing, 16½ feet wide, and 5 feet high. The door the King entered by is now built up. The premises are the property of John Geddes, wright, and are styled in his titles, "*The Laird's Toft.*" The Lairds of Innes were superiors of the village.

danger became too apparent. They tried to escape in the boat, but they found it impossible; for some of the huge piles having given way, so covered the surface with pieces of timber as to render it impossible to propel the boat through the water. They had now no alternative but to clamber over the timber stacks, still standing between them and land; a hazardous attempt, from the wood being slippery with the wet, from the extreme darkness of the night, and, above all, from the danger there was of the whole being lifted up at once by the force of the current, and scattered abroad on the waters like those which had gone before them. But no time was to be lost. They mounted the piles of wood, on the stability of which their lives now depended, whilst the water was rushing through and under them with an ominous and dismaying sound, and most providentially they reached the land. In one instant after they were all safe, the water made a breach 40 yards wide, through the stacks they had travelled over, and soon afterwards dug out a new channel in that direction, which destroyed Lord Seaford's wood-pond, but saved Kingston, by opening a new vent for the flood. Mr James Geddie was employed, with three of his men, in saving some timber that lay within the flood-mark, and he and they were swept away by the sudden violence of the stream. Mr Geddie and two of the men fortunately made their way out, after being carried down for 200 yards. But the fourth individual was in deeper water. For some minutes they heard his heart-rending cries for help, but were able to render him no assistance. The cries ceased; and, chilled with horror at his sudden and melancholy fate, they hurried to Garmouth to apprise their friends. But the joy of all assembled may be

easily conceived, when, as they were bewailing his loss, the young man appeared among them, having, by an extraordinary exertion, swum ashore, greatly exhausted, but without injury.

So great was the body of water that rushed into the sea, that no tide could enter ; whilst, on the other hand, the river was stemmed, and raised as far up as Gar-mouth. The people of that village, for the greater part of a respectable rank in life, were already almost all in bed on the evening of the 3d, when the water began partially to inundate the houses. Even then it was difficult to persuade them that there could be any danger, so far above where any inundation had ever come. But, by 12 o'clock at night, the houses in the lower quarter of the village were deeply flooded ; and, by half-past two o'clock, the first building yielded to the force of the flood, and fell. Then it was that the doubters became suddenly converted. Those who were quite incredulous before were now ready to believe anything. The confusion and bustle became great beyond conception. Some fled immediately ; others, suddenly roused from sleep, leaped from their beds to the knees in water, and found their furniture floating around them. Their noise and clamour waked the inhabitants of the other quarters, and uproar and alarm spread everywhere. The danger, great in reality, was magnified by fear, and by the intense darkness of the night. Lights burst out here and there from windows, and lanterns and torches gleamed on the obscurity of the streets ; whilst signals of distress were flashing from the vessels in the more distant port. Property was at first forgotten in the anxious solicitude of all to save human life. Parents were heard entreating for the rescue of their children, and the middle-

aged imploring for help to the old and infirm. Now were men seen wading into the deep currents that ran through the streets, carrying out women, children, and old people of both sexes, from their houses, half-dressed; the surprise and terror of their countenances partially betrayed by the momentary influence of some accidental light, as they appeared and vanished like spectres. Then followed the incessant rumbling of carts, carrying off furniture, the continual crashing of which sufficiently told the ruin that was going forward, had not that of the frequent fall of houses spoken in a language of a louder and more tremendous tone. And all this was blended with the roar of the elements, the unremitting plash of the rain, and the screams of the timid; and, when the gusts lulled for an instant, the united voices of the seamen, toiling in laborious chorus for their lives, came sad and fearfully from the sorely distressed vessels.

When I visited Garmouth, I beheld many houses of two, and even three storeys, half thrown down, with the nicely painted walls and ceilings of what were snug and comfortable rooms, now laid open perpendicularly, and appearing tier above tier. But what must have been the spectacle, when day dawned on the 4th of August, while the torrents still filled the streets, and the extent of that night's destruction was revealed, and fresh ruin was every moment working?—when, as far as the eye could reach, the neighbouring plain was covered with water, and the beach in the harbour, and along the sweep of the bay, was studded with stranded vessels, and covered with one heap of wreck from river and ocean, composed of immense quantities of wood, dead bodies of animals, furniture, and an endless variety of heterogeneous articles, strangely tossed and blended together in one common ruin.

The mouth of the river, which, previous to the flood, was not above 20 yards wide, had a breach of 400 yards open through it, by which the vessels in the harbour were exposed to the greatest danger. The schooner Pursuit was driven from her chains out to the bar; and the fury of the rush of water may be judged of from the fact, that her salvation was effected by her being kept dreadfully balanced between it and the opposing force of the violent north-east wind, to which her crew crowded all her canvas. The Barbara and Anne was swept from her moorings, and carried the Unity along with her. The one was driven ashore within the bar, and the other, having no one on board, was forced to sea, drifted to the eastward, and thrown up on the top of the beach. The Good Intent was also driven on the east beach. The Elizabeth held by her moorings, but was upset by the current, and her crew only saved by desperately leaping ashore. Two vessels went on shore between the Spey and Port-Gordon; and two others, the Lizard and the Lively, which left Leith together, were stranded within ten yards of each other, four miles to the eastward of Speymouth. The Robert of Limekilns foundered beyond Spey's Bay, and all on board perished; but fortunately no lives were lost in any of the other vessels, most of which were afterwards saved from utter wreck.\*

The scene for miles along the beach was at once animated and terrible. Crowds were employed in endeavouring to save the wood and other wreck with

\* The harbour, formerly very safe, has been rendered very much the reverse by the flood. Every succeeding stream-tide now sweeps away a fresh portion of the beach of gravel, between the river and Kingston, so that serious apprehensions are entertained that the sea will encroach and carry off the lower end of the village.

which the heavy rolling tide was loaded ; whilst the margin of the sea was strewed with the carcasses of domestic animals, and with millions of dead hares and rabbits. Thousands of living frogs also, swept from the fields, no one can say how far off, were observed leaping among the wreck.

It would be quite hopeless to attempt to give any minute detail of the damage done at Garmouth. Eight dwelling-houses and seven other buildings were utterly or nearly destroyed ; and there was scarcely a house in the lower quarter of the village which was not injured, or a garden-wall which was not swept away. Opposite to the saw-mill of Garmouth, where the width of the inundation was fully a mile, the flood rose 10 feet 2 inches above the ordinary level ; and at Kingston Port, where the width was about half-a-mile, it rose 13 feet 9 inches. These measurements, of course, refer to the Spey in its ordinary state.

The kind and charitable exertions of the inhabitants of such parts of Garmouth as were safe, towards providing for the comfort of their less fortunate neighbours, were most exemplary. A party of gentlemen from Gordon Castle were to have dined on the 4th with Captain Fyfe, but the fall of the Bridge of Spey prevented any of them from appearing. The gallant Captain did not lack guests, however ; for he went about and indiscriminately invited the families and individuals who had been forced from their homes, and who now depended for food and shelter on the hospitality of their neighbours, and had the satisfaction of presiding over a numerous and grateful company. As the losses in Garmouth fell chiefly on the wealthy, only eight cases of destitute families were produced here.