

THE LEGEND OF THE BUILDING OF
BALLINDALLOCH.

As you go down the avenue leading from the bridge to the present house of Ballindalloch, gentlemen, you cross a small rivulet that rushes headlong with a cheerful sound from the wooded banks rising on your right hand, the which, after finding its way under the road through what is commonly called a *cundy* bridge, throws itself over the rocks directly into the pellucid stream of the Aven, that accompanies you on your left. If you should chance to go down that way, and if you should be tempted to trace that little rill upwards through the wild shrubbery, and among the tangled roots of the venerable oaks and other trees which shoot up every where in fantastic shapes from its sides, and by throwing their outstretched arms across its

bed here and there, produce a pleasing contrast of chequered light and shade, you will find many a nook amid its mazes, which a fanciful yemagination might set apart as a haunt befitting those frisking creatures of the poet's brain Oberon and Titania, and where the sly tricks and *pawky* gambols of Puck and the fairy folk might well be played. I think, indeed, that I could almost venture to assert, that no one truly filled with what may be termed the romance of poetry, could well pass a few hours' vigil in the thick retirement of that lovely and sequestered grove, with the full moon piercing through the openings in the canopy of foliage, and shining directly down the little ravine where that musical rill flows, its beams converting the rushing waters into silver, and the dew-drops of every leaf, flower, or blade of grass on its banks into diamonds, without looking to come pop upon some tiny fairy palace, or to be charmed by some witching sight or sound, that, for the time at least, may make him forget that he is a mortal. This opinion I venture to pronounce on the mere internal yevidence afforded by the spot itself, as well as by the recollections of my own feelings when I chanced to wander up the place under similar cir-

cumstances, with this simple addition, to be sure, that I had been at a wedding that night, and had consequently a small drop of toddy in my head. But be that as it may, the vulgar supposition that it is inhabited by supernatural beings is borne out by the corroborative testimony of very ancient tradition. From time immemorial it has been called *the Castle Stripe*, and the origin of this name is linked with some old foundations which are still to be seen on the summit of the bank above, the legendary history of which I am now going to tell you.

It is believed that several centuries have passed away since the Laird of Ballindalloch proposed to build himself a castle or peel tower for his more secure abode in times when the prevalence of private feuds required strength of position and solidity of structure ; and having, doubtless, first and foremost sat down like a sensible man to count the probable cost of his contemplated edifice, he next, with yespecial prudence, set about considering where he should find the best site to yereck it on ; and after a careful examination of his domains, he at last fixed on the vurre spot now occupied by those old foundations I spake of. This place pos-

sessed many advantages in his eyes, for, whilst it was itself overlooked by nothing, it not only commanded a pleasant prospect over all the haughs and low grounds of his own property, but it also enjoyed a view of the whole of the lands of Tulloch-Carron, lying on the opposite side of the Aven; and between that river and the Spey, above their point of junction, and this the goodman considered a thing of very great importance at a time when that property was in the hands of another laird, with whom, if there was not then a quarrel, yet nobody could say how soon a quarrel might arise.

This very weighty matter of consideration being thus settled in his own mind, he began his operations with vigour. Numerous bodies of masons and labourers were applied to the work. In a few days the foundations were dug and laid, and several courses of the masonry appeared above ground, and the undertaking seemed to be going on in the most prosperous manner, and perfectly to the laird's satisfaction.

But what was the astonishment of the workmen one morning, when, on returning by sunrise to their labour, they discovered that the whole of the new-

ly built walls had disappeared, aye, down to the vurra level of the ground! The poor fellows, as you may guess, were terrified beyond measure. Fain would they have altogether desisted from a work over which, it was perfectly plain, that if some powerful enemy had not the control, some strange and mysterious fatality must certainly hang. But in those days lairds were not men to whom masons, or simple delvers of the ground could dare to say nay. He of whom I am now telling you was determined to have his own way, and to proceed, in spite of what had occurred, and in defiance of what might occur; and having sent round and summoned a great many more workmen in addition to those already employed, he set them to the work with redoubled vigilance, and ere the sun of another day went down, he had raised the walls very nearly to the height which they had reached the previous evening before their most unaccountable disappearance.

But no sooner had the light of a new morning dawned, than it was discovered that the whole work had again disappeared down to the level of the ground. The people were frightened out of their senses. They hardly dared to go near the

spot. But the terrors which the very name of the laird carried with it, swallowed up all their other terrors, as the serpent into which the rod of Moses was converted, swallowed up all those that sprang from the rods of the magicians of Egypt; and as the laird only became so much the more obstinate from all these mysterious thwartings which he met with, the poor people were obliged to tremble in secret, and immediately to obey his will. The whole country was scoured, and the number of workmen was again very much increased, so that what by cuffing and what by coaxing (means which I find it *purra* beneficial to employ by turns to stimulate my own scholars to their tasks), nearly double the usual quantum of work was done before night. But, alas! the next morning's dawn proved that the building of this Peel-tower of Ballindalloch continued to be like unto the endless weaving of the web of Penelope, for each succeeding morning saw the work of the previous day annihilated by means which no human being could possibly divine.

“What *can* be the meaning of all this?” said the laird to Ian Grant, his faithful henchman, vexed out of all patience as he was at last by this

most provoking and perplexing affair. "Who *can* be the author of all this mischief?"

"Troth I cannot say, sir," replied Ian. "The loons at the work think that it is some spite taken up against us by the *good people*."*

"Good people!" cried the laird in a rage. "What mean you by good people? More likely fiends, I wot."

"For the love of the Virgin use better terms, Ballindalloch," replied Ian. "Who knows what ears may be listening to us unseen."

"If I did not know thee to be as brave a fellow as ever handled a broadsword, I would say shame on thee, Ian, for a coward!" cried the laird. "Hark, ye! I would not wilfully anger the *good people* more than thou wouldst do. But I cannot help thinking that some bad people—some of my unfriends—some secret enemies of mine, of mortal mould, must have, some how or other, contrived, by devilish arts, to do me all these ill turns."

"It will be easy to find that out, sir," said Ian, "we have only to plant a good guard all night on the works."

* *Good people*, the propitiatory name usually given by the superstitious peasants to the fairies.

“That was exactly what I was thinking of, Ian,” said the laird, “and I was a fool not to have thought of it before. Set the masons to their task again, then, without delay, and see that they be not idle, and take care to have a night-watch ready to mount over the work the moment the sun goes to bed. I’ll warrant me we shall find out the scoundrels, or if we do not, we shall at least have the satisfaction of putting a stop to their devilish amusement.”

None of Ballindalloch’s people, however brave, were very much enamoured of any such duty, however honourable it might have been considered. But his orders were too imperative to be disobeyed, and so some dozen or twain of stout handlers of the old broad-bladed Scottish spear were planted as sentinels to patrol around the walls during the night. These gallant fellows took care to carry with them some cordials to keep their spirits up, and by a liberal use of them, the first two or three dreary hours of darkness passed off with tolerable tranquillity and comfort, and as time wore on, and their courage waxed stronger and stronger, they began to be of the laird’s opinion, that however wonderful previous yevents had appeared to

be, there had in reality been nothing supernatural in them ; and, moreover, whatever might be the nature of the enemy, they were by no means disposed to venture to molest the brave defenders of the new walls.

Full of these convictions, their contempt of all earthly foes increased, as their dread of unearthly enemies subsided ; and as there was an ancient and wide-spreading oak tree, growing within about forty or fifty paces of the walls, they thought that they might as well retire beneath the shelter of its shade, as some protection from the descending damps. This they were the more readily induced to do, seeing that from thence they could quite easily observe the approach of any suspicious people who might appear. Nay, they even judged that the cowardly enemy who might otherwise have been scared by observing so stout an armed band about the walls, might now be encouraged to shew themselves by their temporary concealment.

“ Come away now, Duncan man,” said one of these heroes to a comrade, after they had drawn themselves together into a jovial knot, close to the huge trunk of the oak. “ Come away, man, with your flask. I’m wondering much whether the

juice that is in its body be of the same mettlesome browst, as that which came with so heart-stirring a smack out of the vitals of Tom's leathern bottle."

"Rest its departed spirit, Charly! it was real comfortable and courage-giving stuff," said another.

"By Saint Peter, but that's no worse!" said Charly, tasting it and smacking his lips, "Hah! it went to my very heart's core. Such liquor as this would make a man face the devil."

"Fie! let us not talk of such a person," said Tom. "I hope it is enow, if its potency, amounteth even so high, as to make us do our duty against men like ourselves."

"Men like ourselves!" cried Charly. "I trow such like as ourselves are not to be furnished from the banks of either Aven or Spey,—aye, or from those of any other river or stream that I wot of. Give me another tug of thy most virtuous flask there, Duncan. Hah!—I say again that the power of clergy and holy water is nothing to this. It would stir a man up to lay the very devil himself. What sayest thou and thy red nose, old Archy Dhu."

"I say that I think thou art speaking some-

what unadvisedly," replied Archy, stretching out his hand at the same time, and taking the flask from Charly, as he was about to apply it to his lips for the third time in succession.

"Stay thy hand, man. Methinks it is my turn to drink."

"Silence!" said one who had command over them. "Can ye not moderate your voices, and speak more under breath? Your gabbling will spoil all."

"Master Donald Bane hath good reason with him, gentlemen," said Archibald Dhu, in a subdued tone. "For my part, I shall be silent;" and well might he say so, seeing that at that moment he turned aside to hold long and sweet converse with the flask.

"I tell ye, we must be quiet as mice," said Master Donald. "Even our half-whispers might be heard by any one stealing towards the walls, amidst the unbroken stillness of this night."

The night was indeed still as the grave. Not a leaf was stirring. Even the drowsy hum of the beetle was hushed, and no sound reached their ears but the tinkling music of the tiny rill that ran through the little runnel near them, in its way to-

wards the ravine in the bank, and the soft murmur of the stream of the Aven, coming muffled through the foliage from below; when, on a sudden, a mighty rush of wind was heard to arise from the distant top of Ben-Rinnes, which terribly grew in strength as it came rapidly sweeping directly towards them. So awfully terrific was the howl of this whirlwind, that the very hairs of the heads of even the boldest of these hardy spearmen stood stiff and erect, as if they would have lifted up their iron skull-caps. Every fibre of their bodies quivered, so that the very links of their shirts of mail jingled together, and *Aves* and *Pater-nosters* came not only from the mouths of such brave boasters as Charly, but they were uttered right glibly by many a bold bearded lip to which, I warrant me, they had been long strangers. On came the furious blast. The sturdy oak under which they had taken shelter, beat every man of them to the ground by the mere bending of its bole and the writhing of its boughs and branches. Wild shrieks were heard in the air amid the yelling of the tempest, and a quick discharge of repeated plunges in the Aven below, announced to them that some heavy materials had been thrown into

it. Again, the whirlwind swept instantaneously onwards; and as it was dying away among the mountains to the north of the Spey, an unearthly laugh, loud as thunder, was heard over their heads.

No sooner had this appalling peal of laughter ceased, than all was again calm and still as death. The great oak under which the discomfited men of the watch lay, heaped one on another, immediately recovered its natural position. But fear had fallen so heavily on these bruised and prostrate men-at-arms, that they dared not even to lift their bodies to the upright position; but creeping together around the root of the tree, they lay quivering and shaking with dread, their teeth chattering together in their heads like handfulls of *chucky* stones, till the sun arose to put some little courage into them with his cheering rays. Then it was that they discovered, to their horror and dismay, that the whole work done by the masons during the preceding day at the new building, had been as completely razed and obliterated as it had ever been upon any of the previous nights. You may believe, gentlemen, that it required some courage to inform their stern master of the result of their

night's watch ; and with one consent they resolved that Ian Grant, the laird's henchman, should be first informed ; and he was earnestly besought to be their vehicle of communication.

“ Psha ! ” cried the laird impatiently, when the news reached him. “ I cannot believe a word of this, Ian. The careless caitiffs have trumped up this story as an apology for their own negligence in keeping a loose watch. I'll have every mother's babe of them hanged. A howling tempest and an elrich laugh, saidst thou ? Ha ! ha ! ha ! Well indeed might these wicked unfriends of mine, who have so outwitted these lazy rascals, laugh till their sides ached, at the continued success of their own mischief. I'll warrant it has been some of Tulloch Carron's people ; and if my fellows had been worth the salt that they devour at my expense, assuredly we might have had the culprits swinging on the gallows-tree by this time. So our men may e'en swing there in their stead.”

“ If Tulloch Carron's people have done these pranks, they must be bolder and cleverer men than I take them for,” said Ian calmly. “ But before we set these poor fellows of ours a-dancing upon nothing, with the gallows-tree for their part-

ner, methinks we may as well take a peep into the stream of the Aven, where the wonderful clearness of the water will shew a pebble at the depth of twenty feet. Certain it is, that there came a strange and furious blast over these valleys last night; and there may be no harm in just looking into the Aven, to see if any of the stones of the work be lying at the bottom."

"There can be no harm in that," said the laird, "so let us go there directly."

They went accordingly; and to the great surprise of both master and man, they saw distinctly that the bed of the river was covered over with the new hammer-dressed stones; and yet, on examining the high banks above, and the trees and bushes that grew on them, not a trace appeared to indicate that human exertions had been employed to transport them downwards thither from the site of the new building. The laird and his attendant were filled with wonder. Yet still he was not satisfied that his conjectures had been altogether wrong.

"If it has been Tulloch Carron's people," said he, doubtingly, "they must have enlisted the devil himself as their ally. But let them have whom

they may to aid them, I am resolved I shall unravel this mystery, cost what it will. I'll watch this night in person."

"I doubt it will be but a tempting of powers against which mortal man can do but little," said Ian. "But come what come may, I'll watch with thee, Ballindalloch."

"Then haste thee, Ian, and set the workmen to their labour again with all their might," said the laird, "and let the masons raise the building as high as they possibly can from the ground before night; and thou and I shall see whether we shall not keep the stones from flying off through the air like a flight of swallows."

The anxious laird remained all day at the work himself; and as you know, gentlemen, that the master's eye maketh the horse fat, so hath it also a strange power of giving double progress to all matters of labour that it looketh upon. The result was, that when the masons left off in the evening, the building was found to have risen higher than it had ever done before. When night came, the same watch was again set about the walls; for the laird wished for an opportunity of personally convicting the men of culpable careless-

ness and neglect of duty. To make all sure, he and his henchman took post on the embryo peel tower itself.

The air was still, and the sky clear and beautiful, as upon the previous night, and armed with their lances, Ballindalloch and his man Ian walked their rounds with alert steps, throwing their eyes sharply around them in all directions, anxiously bent on detecting any thing that might appear like the semblance of treachery. The earlier hours, however, passed without disturbance; and the confidence of the laird and Ian increased, just as that of the men of the guard diminished, when the hour began to approach at which the entertainments of the previous night had commenced. As this hour drew near, their stolen applications to their cordial flasks became more frequent; but sup after sup went down; and so far from their courage being thereby stirred up, they seemed to be just so much the more fear-stricken every drop they swallowed. They moved about like a parcel of timid hares, with their ears pricked up, ready to drink in the first note of intimation of the expected danger. A bull feeding in the broad pastures stretch-

ing between them and the base of Ben Rinnes, bel-
lowed at a distance.

“ Holy Mother, there it comes !” cried Charly. In an instant that hero and all the other heroes fled like roe-deer, utterly regardless of the volley of threats and imprecations which the enraged laird discharged after them, like a hail-storm, as they retreated, their ears being rendered deaf to them by the terror which bewildered their brains ; and in the twinkling of an eye not a man of them was to be seen.

“ Cowards !” exclaimed the laird, after they were all gone. “ To run away at the roaring of a bull !” The braying of an ass would have done as much. Of such stuff, I warrant me, was that whirlwind of last night composed, of which they made out so terrible a story.”

“ What could make the fellows so feared ?” said Ian. “ I have seen them stand firm in many a hard fought and bloody field. Strange, that they should run at the routing of a bull.”

“ And so the villains have left you and me alone, to meet whatever number of arms of flesh may be pleased to come against us ! Well, be it so, Ian.

I flinch not. I am resolved to find out this mystery, come what may of it. Ian, you have stood by me singly ere now; and I trust you will stand by me again; for I am determined that nothing mortal shall move me hence till morning dawns."

"Whatever you do, Ballindalloch," replied his faithful henchman, "it shall never be said that Ian Grant abandoned his master. I will"—

"Jesu Maria! what sound is that?" exclaimed the laird, suddenly interrupting him, and starting into an attitude of awe and dread.

And no marvel that he did so; for the wail of the rising whirlwind now came rushing upon them from the distant summit of Ben Rinnes. In an instant its roar was as if a tempestuous ocean had been rolling its gigantic billows over the mountain top; and on it swept so rapidly, as to give them no farther time for colloquy. A lurid glare of light shot across the sky from south to north. Shrieks,—fearful shrieks,—shrieks such as the mountain itself might have uttered, had it been an animated being, mingled with the blast. It was already upon them, and in one moment both master and man were whirled off through the air and over the bank, where they were tossed, one over

the other, confounded and bruised, into the thickest part of a large and wide spreading holly bush ; and whilst they stuck there, jammed in among the boughs, and altogether unable to extricate themselves, they heard the huge granite stones, which had been that day employed in the work, whizzing through the air over their heads, as if they had been projected from one of those engines which that warlike people, the ancient Romans, called a balista or catapult ; and ever and anon they heard them plunged into the river below, with a repetition of deep hollow sounds, resembling the discharge of great guns. The tempest swept off towards the north, as it had done on the previous night ; and a laugh, that was like the laugh of a voice of thunder, seemed to them to re-echo from the distant hills, and made the very blood freeze in their veins. But what still more appalled them, this tremendous laugh was followed by a yet more tremendous voice, as if the mountain had spoken. It filled the whole of the double valley of the Aven and the Spey, and it repeated three times successively this whimsical command.

“ Build in the Cow-haugh !—Build in the Cow-haugh !—Build in the Cow-haugh ! ”—and again

all nature returned to its former state of stillness and of silence.

“ Saint Mary help me !” cried Ian from his position, high up in the holly bush where he hung, doubled up over the fork of two boughs, with his head and his heels hanging down together like an old worsted stocking. “ Saint Mary help me !—where am I ?—and where is the laird ?”

“ Holy St. Peter !” cried the laird, from some few feet below him, “ I rejoice to hear thy voice, Ian. Verily, I thought that the hurricane which these hellish—no—I mean these *good people* raised, had swept all mortals but myself from the face of this earth.”

“ I praise the Virgin that thou art still to the fore, Ballindalloch,” said Ian. “ In what sort of plight art thou, I pray thee ?”

“ In very sorry plight, truly,” said the laird,—sorely bruised and tightly and painfully jammed into the cleft of the tree, with my nose and my toes more closely associated together than they have ever been before, since my first entrance into this weary world. Canst thou not aid me, Ian ?”

“ Would that I could aid thee, Ballindalloch,” said Ian mournfully ; “ but thou must e’en take

the will for the deed. I am hanging here over a bough, like a piece of sheep's tripe, without an atom of *fushon** in me, and confined, moreover, by as many cross-branches as would cage in a black-bird. I fear there is no hope for us till day-light."

And in good sooth there they stuck maundering in a maze of speculation for the rest of the night.

When the morning sun had again restored sufficient courage to the men of the watch, curiosity led them to return to ascertain how things stood about the site of the building which they had so precipitately abandoned. They were horror-struck to observe, that in addition to the utter obliteration of the whole of the previous day's work, the laird himself, and his henchman Ian Grant, had disappeared. At first they most naturally supposed that they had both been swept away at once with the walls of the new building on which they stood, and that they could never hope to see them again, more than they could expect to see the stones of the walls that had been so miraculously whirled away. But piteous groans were heard arising from the bank below them; and on searching farther, Ballindalloch and his man Ian were

* Strength.

discovered and released from their painful bastille. The poor men-at-arms who had formed the watch were mightily pleased to observe, that the laird's temper was most surprisingly cooled by his night's repose in the holly bush. I need not tell you that he spoke no more of hanging them. You will naturally yemagine, too, that he no longer persevered in pressing the erection of the ill-starred keep tower on the proud spot he had chosen for it, but that he implicitly followed the dread and mysterious order he had received to

“ Build in the Cow-haugh !”

He did, in fact, soon afterwards commence building the present Castle of Ballindalloch, in that beautiful haugh which stretched between the Aven and the Spey, below their junction, which then went by the name of the Cow-haugh; and the building was allowed to proceed to its conclusion without the smallest interruption.

Such is the legend I promised you, gentlemen; and however absurd it may be, I look upon it as curious; for it no doubt covers some real piece of more rational history, regarding the cause of the abandonment of those old foundations which has now degenerated into this wild but poetical fable.